

## A Sketch of Deleuze's Hermeneutical Spin

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to sketch the procedural nature of the modus in which Deleuze reads the other philosophers. The hermeneutical problem indicated by the indecision to consider his books on different authors as an authorized interpretation or as fantasist utilization may be scattered if we understand his hermeneutical attempts both as interpretation and construction (concept or problem). In addition, this indecision affects the guild of Deleuzian exegetes in respect to the directory idea (prime author) which could point out the general strategy of his philosophy.

**Keywords:** interpretation, construction, problematic, Deleuze, Hume, Nietzsche, Kant, Bergson

I believe it is relevant to describe Deleuze's 'interpretive method' in a plural manifestation form because its denomination in singular ought to include a complex web of positions regarding the problems arising from the preparation, conduct and waging of a 'guerilla war' within and with philosophy. This is the reason why I have selected Hume, Nietzsche, Kant and Bergson from his works (written in his early period), the elements that enable the realization of a sketch of his 'method'.

How can one explain Gilles Deleuze's philosophical initiative? How can it be explained taking into account the polymorphous nature resulting from its ambiguous relation with the 'academia'? Will we find an answer in case we discover what his philosophy aims to overcome, accomplish, oppose, or, to put it

more simply, in case we discover who or what does he write against?

If we analyze procedurally the implications of Deleuze's philosophy, we can state in principle that: a) his philosophy is not an unknown fruit (as one could think taking into account the famous exotic titles, especially in the English speaking regions, that announce an exegesis on Deleuze) that emerged accidentally from the old tree of Western philosophy and that b) his genuine concepts are *also* pro/ble/gram/matic reactions to the above mentioned tradition.

Vincent Descombes, one of the authors who attempted to outline the complex situation of the '60s atmosphere in France, exemplifies the subjectivity as main thread. It is a main thread to the extent that subjectivity faced a dual attack: a) against the idealist premises of phenomenology in search of a 'genuine' *cogito*, thus maintaining the subject as a principle, and b) against dialectics seen as pivoting around 'a higher concept of identity' (Descombes 1980, 76). We may relate Deleuze to these combatant attitudes if we widen the meaning presupposed by subjectivity and the horizon of its justifiability, if we take into account the 'flank' it opens up in relation to: "(...) the critique or deconstruction of interiority, of self-presence, of consciousness, of mastery, of the individual or collective property of an essence. Critique or deconstruction of the firmness of a *seat* (*hypokeimenon*, *substantia*, *subjectum*) and the certitude of an *authority* and a *value* (the individual, a people, the state, history, work)." (Nancy 1991, 4)

However, from this perspective only, we observe a purely reactive reactionary presence in Deleuze's case. Does his philosophy coagulates only and to the extent that it is a choleric reaction to the classical themes of philosophy, just like the light of a bulb only draws out and gathers the insects wandering in the dark? It is not by chance (but not undisputable) that the exegesis in the field suggests as direction vectors of Deleuze's philosophy authors that he approached. In this sense, Bergson, Nietzsche and Spinoza are linked in various ways in order to explain the Deleuzian project. Here are some examples taken from the literature in the field to support this argument.

For instance, Badiou believes that Bergson is the true inspiration of Deleuze's thinking (the idealism of his philosophy) (Badiou 1999, 39); in the same spirit, Keith Ansell Pearson believes that Deleuze's ontology owes everything to Bergson and that the reading of Spinoza bears a Bergsonian influence (Pearson 1999, 12). According to Constantin V. Boundas, the transcendental empiricism of Deleuze is Bergson-inspired (Boundas 2006, 11). Michael Hardt divided Deleuze's philosophy into a Bergson-inspired ontology, an ethics supported by Nietzsche's philosophy and a 'politics' supported by a collective model of Spinoza-inspired ethical practice. According to Hardt, the Deleuzian reading of Spinoza has Bergsonian and Nietzschean characteristics, and the successive reading of these authors ensured Deleuze with the anti-Hegelian project of his philosophy (Hardt 1993, X–XII). Todd May states that there is a 'holy Trinity' of Deleuze's philosophy where: Spinoza is the Son, Bergson is the Father and Nietzsche is the Holy Spirit. In the same line, at the 'individual all-round' section, Spinoza and Bergson make up Deleuze's ontology with the immanence and duration concepts. Also, Nietzsche holds the affirmative flag of a subversive ethics (May 2005, 25–27). In contrast (as an exotic contrasting example), Manuel Delanda relates his philosophy to the scientific discourse because he takes Deleuze as a procesualist thinker (Delanda 2002, 14–16).

We might think that the reason why the authors wooed by Deleuze are suggested as *directions* of his thinking consists in the fact that each of them is a counterpoint to the mainstream philosophy: Spinoza to the rationalists and theology; Nietzsche to the philosophy at large, it seems, seen as Platonic metaphysics; Bergson to Kant, Hegel or, generally speaking, to the way philosophical problems are constructed. In the scenarios described by the above mentioned writers, Deleuze appears to suggest himself as a spearhead for an already existing aggressive direction. However, it is imperative that we do not forget that Deleuze's way of reading singles out an author and somehow takes him outside an official tradition. Can it be stated that Deleuze has 'built' himself a tradition or is it possible that the selection of authors, the electivity lying at the basis of their exotic

cohabitation within a 'tradition' is proof of a taste for 'scandal' in philosophy?

I suggest that we discover the method of the Deleuzian reading by following the course of his first books and especially his very first book on Hume's philosophy, which is unjustly absent from the exegesis on the matter.

(a) Although it is not the main object of his first work, Deleuze puts into question the way one can tell which manner of reading is better than another. In Deleuze's view, to position oneself to a text is to detect the problem that makes up the foundation and the structure of a theory, that is to understand and question not the solution to a problem but the very interrogation that rephrases a certain type of experience, presupposing other connections, other differentiation relations, a new way of forcing things out, etc. (a surprisingly recurring theme forty years later in *What is philosophy?*). Therefore, to criticize is to detect a 'force deficit', a too mainstream way of thematizing the basic data of an experience, the insufficiency of a differentiation, the commonplaceness of a comment in relation to the experience of a problem through an author. "To put something in question means subordinating and subjecting things to the question, intending, through this constrained and forced subsumption, that they reveal an essence or a nature. To criticize the question means showing under what conditions the question is possible and correctly raised; in other words, how things would not be what they are were the question different from the one formulated." (Deleuze 1991, 106)

This is the reason why the Deleuzian transcription of the problematics of Hume's empiricism starts with the interrogation of the nature of subjectivity: is it not that the subject constitutes itself within the given? And the condition of possibility, the playground of this interrogation is given by the phrase 'relations are external to ideas' (Deleuze 1991, 24, 119). The Deleuzian empiricism takes on a type of reading that engages the history of philosophy through the problematics that break up the continuous aspect of its history; this reading frames an author with a constant view to the position of a precise problem – such as that of the subject – and to the presentation of the conditions of this problem. Thus, it is understood that to Deleuze the fidelity of a

reading *per se* limits itself to the maintaining of the problematic field, where the problematic field is the univocal relation described (rhizomatically) as the coupling of the problem to its emergence conditions. Therefore, the relation between Hume, his work and Deleuze's position towards it focus on the same fact when the consistency of the reading is in view and not so much its justness. The psychological or social factors can be conceived of as color enhancers of the problematics, that is they express the set of motivations and do not induce the degree of truth nor the degree of falseness of the question. *'Hume' is simply the nominal owner of a problematic field.* In a pragmatist way similar to a certain point with Richard Rorty, Deleuze can tell us that the importance of an author disappears or holds depending on the problematics that can recreate him (Alliez 2004, 33).

However, the generally defining aspect of the Deleuzian reading strategy is the fact that to interpret is to simultaneously construct, and the two generate the true unity of a creation if, of course, the creation makes current a certain problematics. "(...) to see the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him saying. But the child was bound to be monstrous too, because it resulted from all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions that I really enjoyed." (Deleuze 1995, 6)

In other words, the Deleuzian reading way must be simultaneously understood as *interpretation and construction of concept* – a procreating 'sodomizing' as Deleuze himself calls it. A procedural division of this hermeneutic couple distinguishes on the one hand, in the case of the work on Hume, constructivism<sup>1</sup> as an immanent manner of restitution of the conceptual stake of an author, emphasizing the *play* of the structural elements, and on the other hand, an assembly and deconstruction strategy regarding mainly authors and their 'isms', concepts, distinctions pertaining to the official history of philosophy and that may be included generically under the label interpretation. Interpretation plays a minimal role in the assembly of the contrast elements (for instance, Hume – Bergson, Nietzsche – Freud), but a decisive one

when the problematics in question has a certain shape and conflicting determination in connection to a tradition or an event-author (Kant in this case). To be more precise, in the book in question, Deleuze inaugurates the relation Hume – Kant on the subject issue. This relation does not presuppose the reiteration of the historical sequence Hume – Kant in order to discover the difficulties that the former could not overcome in connection with the latter, nor to evaluate the epistemological solfeggio sung by Kant in order to dissipate the atonal skepticism of Hume. In the case of the problematics assumed by Deleuze, the reiteration of this sequence is decisive for the way in which, starting from Hume's philosophy, a theory of subjectivity can be *grounded* in its practical origins, as well as, of course, its conflicting relation with the Kantian transcendental theory.

Formally, the two movements that describe the physics of the Deleusian problematic moves in the case of Hume's philosophy can be extended by suggesting generically and unitarily a new way of working in philosophy, and particularly in the case of each book (Nietzsche, Bergson, Kant, Proust, Sacher-Masoch): a) *an immanent reading that goes through and connects the basic data of a certain problematics*; b) *a critical, sometimes de/re-constructive review or infusion of certain concepts, distinctions, major philosophical theses*.

(b) Deleuze's book on Nietzsche's philosophy is multiply relevant. Its importance can be biographically determined<sup>2</sup>; it is also decisively relevant to the first hand exegesis on Nietzsche. And not least, at the conceptual level, disregarding the other two relevant points, there is a problematics determined by the certification of a 'radical empiricism' and a 'nihilist dialectics'. We can configure and procedurally separate the *construction* and *interpretation* elements in order to detect the relation Deleuze – Nietzsche in his aggressive trial against philosophy the same way we described Deleuze's reading on Hume. "The philosophical learning of an author is not assessed by numbers of quotations, nor by the always fanciful and conjectural check lists of libraries, but by the apologetic or polemical directions of his work itself. We will misunderstand the whole of Nietzsche's work if we do not see "against whom" its principle concepts are directed. Hegelian

themes are present in this work as the enemy against which it fights.” (Deleuze 2002, 162)

Let us imagine Deleuze’s book like a battlefield within philosophy; his strategy must be deduced from the concrete movement of concepts, in connection with the enemy he encircles or carefully studies. The movements *per se* of a concept depending on its operative enemy, the encirclement, the jumble, the constant fight are the signs of what we called *constructivism*. The strategy of scrapping, assembly, local coherence and interdependence inferred from these movements bears the generic title of *interpretation*.<sup>3</sup>

(c) Deleuze’s work on Kant is a source of perplexity for the readers accustomed to his ‘hallucinative’ reading method. There is no ‘problematic staging’, no confronted positions, and no discussion about a possible lack: one is simply confronting some subtle notes depicting the cobweb of Kantian critical philosophy, put down with the thoroughness of an inquirer. In this sense, one of Deleuze’s commentators has a synthetic view on the hermeneutical scenarios displayed by Deleuze in his books, drawing them closer to the detective novel build-up manner: “Philosophy is a detective story to the extent that we start not from the knowledge or assumptions, but from the clues, disparate elements, combined later in a virtual world whose only consistency is the internal consistency of a possible model.” (Antonioni 1999, 15)

In comparison to the method I suggest, consisting in the definition of the Deleuzian reading strategy simultaneously as concept *interpretation and construction*, the narrative premise risks engaging and wasting the Deleuzian philosophy between the folds of an excessive and dominant pragmatist hermeneutics. The investigation of the inquirer assembles the clues in a montage and, secondly, in a coherent virtual scenario through the network of signs intersection and sending. The fact that the montage does not represent the ‘in-self’ of an author does not reduce the Deleuzian procedure to a merely narrative method. Moreover, the montage procedure is energized by a collage method<sup>4</sup> that settles in conceptual constructions the clues of a level, placing it into the multiple and transversal network of the other levels that make up the work of an author; this takes place in various opposition or

alliance scenarios, within an unconventional or elective history of philosophy (Hume deconstructs the transcendental unity of the subject, Nietzsche completes the Kantian critique, Hume's link to Nietzsche concerning the exteriority of relations, the manner in which something can be thought, etc.). What is more, the authors who have a stand at the level of the various problematic representations are distributed differently<sup>5</sup> (the Hume in his first book is different from the Hume in *Difference and Repetition*), in main or secondary roles (Bergson in *Difference and Repetition* in relation to *Logic of Sense*), a neuter tone (the book on Kant) or a negative tone (Kant as an example of the dogmatic image of thinking). *This is why, for Deleuze, the plan and the problematics of every authors, the produced oppositions or alliances are unique.* The Deleuzian investigation may suppose both an interpretation and construction procedure and a neuter action of 'parceling out' and deconstruction, as can be seen in his reading of Kant.<sup>6</sup>

(d) The situation is completely different in his work on Bergson's philosophy. Perhaps that is the reason behind the title of this work – *Bergsonism*. "The notion of difference promises to throw light on the philosophy of Bergson, and inversely, Bergsonism promises to make an inestimable contribution to a philosophy of difference." (Deleuze 2004, 32) The strategy of this work can be, in turn, traced back to the Deleuzian interpretation and construction method, only that, in this case, Deleuze focuses on the problematic lines emerging from what is to become a Bergsonian 'tradition'. Concepts as 'multiplicity', 'virtuality' are to be thrown upon the swarming relentless world and recovered as evanescent nets of experience (that condition no more than that are conditioning in contrast with the *a priori* schemes) making visible par example the concrete cadence of time as the books on *Cinema* have showed. This is the sense in which, and as a consequence of which I can understand the Bergsonian ubiquity in the explanatory positions of many Deleuzian themes.

In conclusion the hermeneutical spin proper to Deleuze's own way of making philosophy is not based on a vulgar or savage utilization of texts, concepts, distinction aiming to reach by all means a postmodern relativistic view on whatever is looking at. On the contrary we are dealing with a very 'serious' (as Foucault has labeled him) undertake in philosophy constructing within



philosophy with the reach material of tradition the virtual structure of what it is that make as to do what we do 'now'.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This term is coined as a terminal overview in the first section of *What is Philosophy?* on the manner in which philosophy makes shifts in the problematic jumps taken from an author to another (subject of Descartes and the subject of Spinoza or Kant for example). Furthermore if *What is philosophy?* is leveraged by a personal investigation of Deleuze regarding his one way of making philosophy, then the sketch of the hermeneutical spin we are trying to draw could be justified by the mega-theme of philosophy as such put in to act in this final book. Guattari is not excluded although the book mention is co-written, just an-present in respect to the lines that are 'fished' from the creative pool of Deleuze first period that stretches from the book on Hume till the *Logic of sense*.

<sup>2</sup> "It was Nietzsche, who I read only later, who extricated me from all this. Because you just can't deal with him in the same sort of way. He gets up to all sorts of things behind *your* back." (Deleuze 1995, 6) This phrase of Deleuze bears special awakens because it is hard to understand why Nietzsche is put in the 'later' list of authors 'dwelt' with since his book on Nietzsche is his second official book. We can understand this sentence if we presume that he wrote the other books (or some of them, *Bergsonism* for example) before that of Nietzsche and the order of publishing is just unimportant irrelevant or that is affirming the difficulties encompassed by his 'strategy' (that we are trying to sketch) and that the resistance of Nietzsche has made his 'capture apparatus' a more sophisticated, evolved philosophical parasite in the body of philosophy.

<sup>3</sup> In the book dedicated to Nietzsche's philosophy we pursue the structural sphere of constructivism in respect to the concepts of force, will to power and the element that is correlated with them – quality. The non-philosophical embodiments present in those concepts (biology, thermo-dynamics) due to Nietzsche one strategy is re-dimensioned by Deleuze in the struggle against Hegelianism. Deleuze is shadowing Nietzsche's philosophy in the light of Salomon Maimon's project that is mainly constructed in regard to Kant's transcendental philosophy, thus we have a Nietzsche that passes (in the figural and literal sense) over Hegel to restate the stakes of post-Kantianism's and in an opening way to solve them. The sphere of interpretation is basically that with which Deleuze is in the first sits of Nietzsche exegesis, a systematic approach of Nietzsche's philosophy (a coherent explication of the relation between force and will to power with all its implications).

<sup>4</sup> We must not forget that Deleuze is assembling various facts from let's simply say non-philosophical domains as literature, art, biology etc. as support for a philosophical thesis (the virtual for example).

<sup>5</sup> Zourabichvili speaks of an "unconventional usage of indirect speech" in Deleuze's book on other authors (Zourabichvili 2004, 14). I would say that Deleuze relates only to what can his procedure retain and not "the story" itself of an author; electivity holds similar to the manner we chose our friends, basically

regarding personal traits and pure resonance. "Whether they're real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. It's a series. If you're not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you're lost. I need my mediators to express myself, and they'd never express themselves without me: you're always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own." (Deleuze 1995, 125) The cause of this rhetorical 'echoes' through others is based first of all on a common cause (critique of transcendence, or ego for example) and in relation to our sketch by the very own procedure of Deleuze 'method' of philosophizing.

<sup>6</sup> "My book on Kant's different; I like it, I did it as a book about an enemy that tries to show how his system works, its various cogs - the tribunal of Reason, the legitimate exercise of the faculties (our subjection to these made all the more hypocritical by our being characterized as legislators)." (Deleuze 1995, 6) Perhaps this is why in *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze will present a graphic sketch of how the subject circumscribed to the rigors of Kantian works. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 56).

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